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ABSTRACT

The Student Assistants' Program (SAP) was implemented at Bronx Community College (BCC) (New York) to reduce attrition between admission and the first day of classes. The principal objective of the program is to train presently enrolled students to provide individual assistance to entering freshmen. These student assistants help new students with registration and orientation through small-group meetings. To evaluate the SAP, students attending orientation sessions in 1990 (N=770) and 1991 (N=1,440) were surveyed about the quality of the orientation and its relevance to their needs. In addition, student assistants were surveyed about their impressions of the orientation meeting, training session, and their performance as orientation leaders; 80% of the student assistants responded. Finally, a questionnaire was sent to all 300 new students who did not complete the fall registration process. Major study findings included the following: (1) on a six-point scale, the overall quality of the orientation meeting was given a 4.75 rating, while the preparation and organization of the student assistant received a 5.18 rating; (2) student assistants gave the highest ratings to the overall quality of the SAP (4.77) and the appropriateness of resources received (4.68) and the lowest ratings to the value of the filmstrip (4.22) and the value of the program to students (4.43); (3) new students who attended the orientation meetings had a no-show rate of 2.3%, while those who did not attend the meeting had a no-show rate of 27.4%; and (4) of students who applied to but did not register at BCC, 41% indicated that they would be attending another school and 32% cited financial reasons for not attending college at this time. This and previous studies confirmed that successful new student orientation programs incorporate personal concern for individual students and small group settings ease students' transition into college. (JMC)

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The Freshman Experience And The Role of Student Assistants

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ERIC SUMMARY

The Student assistants program is an outreach program where upperclassmen are assigned to new students whom they personally assist with registration and orientation to campus resources through small-group orientation meetings.

Student assistants were selected on the basis of their previous college experience GPA (2.00 minimum) and attendance at a training seminar. The training seminar (1) reviewed the student assistants program objectives, (2) clarified the student assistant's responsibility, (3) reviewed the use of the colleges' registration process, and (4) explained the packet of resource materials.

The returns from an evaluation of the program showed that new students perceived the Student Assistants Program as effective in increasing their awareness of college services and programs. The student assistants perceived the program as having value for entering freshmen. They also felt that the training session effectively prepared them to conduct the orientation meetings.

In general, those who attended the orientation meeting also completed the registration process. The no-show rate of students in attendance was appreciably lower when compared to the college's previous no-show rate. That may have been because new students who attended the meeting were firmly committed to attend the college and were simply reinforced by the meetings' contents. Still, the data seem to indicate that there is a direct relationship between attending the orientation meeting and subsequent registration.

THE FRESHMAN EXPERIENCE AND THE ROLE OF STUDENT ASSISTANTS

EMILIO SANTA RITA

Commitment to an institution rests in part on the development of ties between the student and his college. The emotional dimension of these ties has been largely unrecognized by researchers and recruitment personnel. Frequently, the feeling seems to be that you "match" the student to the institution well enough, and if you provide enough services, you have done about all you can, and maybe the "marriage will take" and the student will "fit." In practice, the development of bonds between student and school is largely a matter of chance at many colleges, but it need not be.

Emotional attachments to an institution can be strongly encouraged by support systems carefully designed to converge at the point of entry, the first point of contact between student and institution. The hiatus between admission to and registration in the institution is a sobering period for students. While many remain committed to the institution after admission, others - for a variety of reasons - choose not to attend Although the no-show phenomenon is to be expected, colleges must continue to seek for methods to deal with it directly, aiming to reduce attrition between recruitment and marked by the first day of classes.

At Bronx Community College (BCC), the Student Assistant's Program* has been developed to do this precisely. This article describes the program itself - a program designed to reach out to new freshmen, keeping them "warm" as well as informed about the college during the period between admission and registration and first day of classes. Then the article

*Prof. Carl Saueracker, the former coordinator of counseling (now retired), initiated and put into full operation the Student Assistants' Program at Bronx Community College.

reports the program's results. Also presented are the general implications and conclusions about the effects of using Student Assistants in a campus setting.

ORGANIZATION OF THE STUDENT ASSISTANTS PROGRAM

As an open-admission institution, BCC admits students from all the boroughs of New York. Once admission has been granted, a time lapse with minimal contact between the new student and the college occurs before the beginning of classes. To enhance communication between new students and the college during this period, BCC has developed and implemented a Student Assistants program in which upperclassmen are selected each year and trained to orient new students in college preceding the first day of classes.

Program Objectives

The principal objective of the program is to train presently enrolled students to provide individual assistance to entering freshmen. These upperclassmen are assigned to new students whom they personally assist with registration and orientation to campus resources through small-group orientation meetings. Using informal discussion, they also explain:

1. the academic and social life of the college,
2. special opportunities available on campus such as student clubs and other organizations,
3. how to complete registration materials in order to obtain classes approved by advisors for the semester,
4. key institutional resources such as counseling services, career development office, financial aids office, and so forth.

Selection and Training

The Office of General Counseling has selected and trained hundreds of College Students Assistants during the past two years to create and maintain the first contact. Candidates must meet the following criteria:

1. Previous semester Enrollment - necessary for attendance at the training seminar and to coordinate arrangements for the college.

2. College GPA (minimum of 2.00).

Students selected were then invited to a program briefing meeting. The meeting explained their selection as Student Assistant candidate, assessed their interest in participating in the program's training meeting and conducting an orientation meeting, assigned to them new students entering the college and explained the program's objectives.

Subsequently a half-day training seminar was held which

1. reviewed the Student Assistant program objectives
2. clarified the responsibilities of the Student Assistants
3. reviewed the use of the college and the college registration process.
4. explained the packet of resource materials.

The focus of the training session was to prepare the Student Assistant to meet the program's objectives. Much of the training emphasis was aligned with the Student Assistant's experiences. Most have experienced, for example, the registration process several times and have been involved in the college's scholarship, financial aid and honors programs, areas about which entering freshmen have the most questions. The Student Assistant was paid $7.00 an hour for assisting entering freshmen.

To maintain program continuity, all mailings to new students were coordinated by the college's Office of Admissions. The Office of Admissions issues invitation to new students. The invitation (1) congratulated the new student on being accepted to the college, (2) introduced the BCC Student Assistant and explained his or her role in the new student's transition to college life, (3) explained the objectives of the orientation meeting, and (4) and provided the date, time, and place of first registration.

PROGRAM EVALUATION

Purpose

The program evaluation sought to answer the following questions:

1. Does an orientation program have a positive effect on entering freshmen?
2. Did BCC's findings substantiate research literature on using student assistants as orientation leaders?.
3. What are the perceptions of the Student Assistants of the program?
4. What is the effect, if any, of the program on the college's no-show rate?
5. What are the most important reasons why admitted students do not initiate or complete the registration process?

Sample and Returns

To answer these questions and to understand more fully the impact of the Student Assistants Program, three surveys were developed and administered. The first survey was handed out at the end of each orientation session. New students were asked to evaluate the session on several aspects of the meeting on a scale of 1 (very poor -- not helpful)

Table 1
Orientation Quality - New Students Evaluation
(1 being very poor to 6 being very outsanding)

	n=296* 1990			n=560** 1991			n=987 Both Years		
	Mean	S.D.	%***	Mean	S.D.	%***	Mean	S.D.	%***
1. Overall, the meeting was relevant to my needs.	4.92	0.91	93	4.69	0.93	90	4.75	0.93	91
2. The registration information was	4.83	0.89	94	4.69	0.90	91	4.73	0.90	92
3. Information on social/cultural activities was	4.83	0.94	92	4.55	1.02	86	4.65	1.01	88
4. The Student Assistant was well prepared and organized	5.33	0.81	97	5.13	0.94	95	5.18	0.92	95
5. The meeting improved my attitude toward BCC	5.03	0.93	94	4.68	1.07	87	4.76	1.04	88
6. The meeting spoke to important concerns or presented skills/ideas I can use	4.84	0.97	91	4.60	1.01	87	4.66	1.00	88
7. Before the meeting my knowledge of the subject area was	3.54	1.16	49	3.56	1.12	50	3.56	1.13	49
8. Because of the meeting, my knowledge of BCC, its services and programs is	4.67	0.75	95	4.54	0.69	90	4.57	0.83	91

* 296 evaluation forms returend from 770 in attendance
** 865 evlaution froms returend from 1440 in attendance
*** Percent Rated Good or Better

to 6 (outstanding -- most helpful). Usable surveys were received from 761 students for a return rate of 68 percent.

The second survey was a Student Assistant Evaluation Form. The Student assistants were asked to respond to their impressions of the orientation meeting, training session and their performance as orientation leaders of the meeting. The survey had an 80 percent return rate.

The third survey was sent to all new students who did not initiate or complete the fall registration process. The questionnaire was mailed to 300 freshmen and 131 responses were received for a return rate of 48 percent.

Results

The results of the questionnaires showed the following:

1 The quality of the orientation meeting as perceived by new students was rated high.

2. In general, the major findings of this study were consistent with national findings concerning the effectiveness of using students as group leaders of small group orientation sessions that focus on the individual needs of the new student.

3. The effectiveness of the orientation presentation as perceived by the Student assistant was rated high.

4. New students who attended the orientation meetings had a no-show rate of 2.3 percent, whereas those who did not attend the meeting had a no-show rate of 27.4 percent.

5. Reasons why students chose not to register after being admitted to the college vary. The majority response was related to finances.

Table 2
Orientation Quality - Student Assistants Evaluation
(1 being very poor to 6 being very outsanding)

	n=45* 1990			n=92** 1991			n=137 Both Years		
	Mean	S.D.	%***	Mean	S.D.	%***	Mean	S.D.	%***
1. Overall, the quality of the Student Assistants Program was	4.96	0.60	100	4.67	0.69	95	4.77	0.68	97
2. Overall, the quality of the BCC training session was	4.48	0.80	90	4.48	0.79	86	4.48	0.88	88
3. I would rate my overall performance in all aspects of the Student Assistants Program as	4.70	0.59	100	4.39	0.93	94	4.50	0.66	95
4. I feel that my meeting was	4.80	0.55	100	4.47	0.69	94	4.58	0.67	96
5. The value of the program to the students was	4.61	0.89	93	4.28	0.86	85	4.43	0.83	86
6. The appropriateness of the resources I was given was	4.98	0.73	98	4.44	0.87	86	4.68	0.95	89
7. The value of the filmstrip to my presentation was	4.73	1.14	82	3.95	1.24	73	4.22	1.26	76

* 45 evaluation forms returned from 770 in attendance
** 92 evaluation forms returned from 1440 in attendance
*** Percent Rated Good or Better

New students perceived the Student assistants program as effective in increasing their awareness of college services and programs. As indicated by the data displayed in Table 1, the program was perceived as relevant to new students' needs and increased their interest in attending the college. Over the two year period of the program, forty percent (or 1010 students) of the students invited attended the orientation meeting.

Feedback from the Student Assistants was valuable. Based upon their recommendations, program changes and improvements were made from the first year to the second. Overall, the student assistants perceived the program as having value for entering freshmen. They also felt that the training session effectively prepared them to conduct the orientation meeting. Greater detail on these points is provided via the data displayed in Table 2.

In general, those who attended the orientation meeting also completed the registration process. The no-show rate of students in attendance was appreciably lower when compared to the college's previous no-show rate. But, overall, the college's no-show rate remained the same for both years of the program. That may have been because new students who attended the meeting were firmly committed to attend the college and were simply reinforced by the meetings' contents. Still, the data seem to indicate that there is a direct relationship between attending the orientation meeting and subsequent registration.

Table 3

Students Accepted But Did Not Register
Showing Reasons Why They Do Not Plan To Attend At This Time

Reason	n=415 N	%
I will attend another school	169	41
Financial Reasons	134	32
Future Enrollment	67	16
Other (e.g.got a job)	42	10
Don't plan to attend college	3	1

Table 4

Students Who Applied But Did Not Register
Showing Main Reasons To Attend Another Institution Ranked By Importance
(1 being least important to 7 being most important)

Reason	n=415 N	Mean	S.D
I was offered scholarship elsewhere	121	6.17	1.24
Lower cost at another institution	103	5.68	1.03
Other institution closer to home	87	5.55	1.42
Job opportunity near chosen college	60	4.55	1.10
I wanted a more "prestigious" college	57	4.14	1.66

The most important reason given by students who did not register was that they planned to attend another college. Attending another school, although given as an important reason was, however, really more closely aligned with finances; lower cost of transportation, closer to home and closer to job site. Data substantiating these points are provided in Tables 3 and 4.

IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

If institutions admit students, they should commit both themselves and their resources to helping those students matriculate. Though students may be successfully recruited, those who lack contact with and awareness of institutional services are less likely to complete the registration process. On the other hand students who believe in the quality and responsiveness of the institution are far more likely to persist to entry. Institutions can assist newly admitted students before their entry and thus increase registration if they focus on

*maintaining consistent and meaningful contact with new students before they begin classes,

*clarifying new student expectations and college programs,

*providing advisement and support to meet student's needs and,

*responding as far as possible to the students individually.

Consistent with these four suppositions, the study indicates that, first, new students responded favorably to an outreach orientation programs. If nothing more, the Student Assistants program served a public relations function for the college. Evaluations indicated that the program successfully reduced student apprehension. The Student Assistants' experiences on campus, their availability as a resource

throughout the summer, and the question and answer period in the orientation meeting provided avenues to adequately resolved the transition problems. Specifically, assistance with the registration process and the opportunity to meet and become acquainted with other BCC students from the area proved to be invaluable assets of the program.

Second, Student Assistants, properly trained, lend a significant dimension and quality to the college's orientation process. The involvement of students helping other students is, perhaps, the most important finding of this study. Most institutions have long respected the influence and value of the peer helper. Research confirms that properly trained student orientation leaders assist new students to matriculate successfully into the college community and aid them in enhancing their awareness of institutional resources. They further provide an atmosphere in which students feel willing to ask questions (Brown, 1971; Draper, 1978; Harris, 1980; Knott and Daher, 1978; Wigent, 1971).

Evaluation of the program reinforced two findings of earlier studies. Successful new student orientation programs contain attributes of personal concern for individual students (Beck, 1980; Cessa, 1980; Hornbuckle and Mahoney, 1979; Kramer, 1983; Lowe, 1980); that is, the unique needs and concerns of each student must be addressed if college orientation programs are to be successful. Additionally, small group settings are excellent ways to ease students' transition into college (Pappas, 1967; Knott and Daher, 1978); that is, small groups are invaluable in providing emotional stability, social interaction and academic information. The findings of this study recommend continued use of properly trained Student assistants

particularly within campus settings. They demonstrate the college's concern for the individual student and serve the institution's need to disseminate and individualize academic information.

Third, the majority of students who did not register also did not attend the pre-orientaion meeting. The reasons for not initiating or completing the registration process are not statistically significant. They are better understood in relation to reasons that focus on obtaining financial resources to support educational costs. The investigation shows that at the time of admission some student consider several alternatives to financing their education and, therefore, remain quasi-commited to the college. On the other hand, students who attend the orientation meeting gained a deeper sense of commitment to the college. The study suggests that a more concerted effort should be made to increase students' awareness of the college's financial aid programs, perhaps as part of the college orientation meeting, and to increase attendance at the meeting.

To the extent that the findings are valid, the study suggests that future inquiry should attempt to follow-up on those students who attended the orientation meeting and those who did not to determine retention after enrollment. Of particular importance would be investigations that (a) link orientation programming with student development needs, and (b) compare reasons for student attrition with new students who participate in enrollment activities and those who did not.

In summary, institutions can assist new students in transition from admission to registration by promoting student's understanding of the institution after admission, involving and training Student Assistants to assist new students, and conducting orientation meetings before the term begins through the use of Student Assistants.

Specifically, practitioners can organize an outreach orientation program designed to help bridge the gap between admission and registration by

1. identifying and organizing upperclassmen as orientation student assistants;
2. developing and implementing a student assistants training program (designed to meet institutional needs - e.g. registration);
3. arranging site, time and place to conduct pre-orientation sessions; and
4. evaluating program results.

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